Short Papers

Ms. Allison Covey

Regis College at the University of Toronto

“The Lord God Made Them All: Trinitarian Relational Ontology as an Alternative Starting Point for Moral Decision Making”

Moral standing, in a variety of moral theories, is understood relationally, describing the position of one relative to the other. Moral theology itself is necessarily a means of organising and understanding the relationality inherent in the ontology of being. While the superiority of humanity as a species has been defended on a variety of grounds, these defences arise first from a prior claim to a superior relationship with the Creator. That humans were set apart by God is the claim for which reason, morality, and language are merely supports, offered as evidence of the truth of the claim or justifications for God's choice. It is this relationship of humanity to God that has served as the lens through which other animals are viewed without due consideration of whether this lens may be warped. This paper argues that, in considering the animal question, moral theology must begin instead with love, in particular the love and relationality of the Trinity that serves as a model for all Christian living.  
  
Although the deconstruction of traditional moral categories is useful in illuminating the spaces in moral theology where non-human animals can enter and demand consideration, the notion that working within this existing analytic framework is the only way to justify moral consideration for other species is itself a thing to be deconstructed. As philosophers Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall hold in their responses to Onora O'Neill, reasoned argument is but one way of approaching the animal question and a way that is invested with a particular politics of anthropocentric dualism.  
  
Philosopher Anca Gheaus proposes, as an alternative, a normative approach grounded in the importance of meeting needs. While animal rights theorists like Singer and Regan stress an ethic that takes as its foundation various qualities of the non-human animal itselfâ€”sentience, pain, interestsâ€”Gheaus starts with love. Like Diamond, she challenges the suggestion that affect and relationality have no place in philosophical discourse. Particularly in the realm of theological ethics, a consideration of love seems entirely appropriate. While an ethic based on the sentiment of humans is unjustifiably anthropocentric and can lead to the kind of arbitrary species differentiation already witnessed today, to discount love altogether is a likewise unproductive manoeuver.  
  
Challenging traditional standards of moral considerability is insufficient on its own to establish a human moral duty toward other animals. Gheaus notes that even advocates of an ethic of care approach stop short of articulating why it is that human compassion for non-human animals is morally relevant. She points herself to reciprocal love, particularly between humans and domestic animals, a solution that results in an ethic with limited applicability. This focus on a "shared need for mutual love" can be salvaged only by a theocentric turn, a reference to the limitless, all-encompassing love for which all creatures share an ontological, existential need, the love of the Creator. It is not merely the creature's potential as an object of love that invests them with moral value but their being actual objects of God's love.

Rev Dr. Victor Austin

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“Robert D. Sacks's Interpretation of the Bible Concerning Our Relation to Other Animals: Problematics of Creation, Rule, and Sacrifice”

This paper problematizes our understanding of the biblical depiction of our relation to non-human animals by means of a close explication of Robert Sacks's Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Sacks's perspective is unique. A long-time tutor at St. John's College in Santa Fe, Sacks reads the Bible, in accordance with that school's educational philosophy, as a "great book." His commentary gives a close reading that is also synoptic of the whole (he finds in Genesis a recapitulation of much of the Hebrew Bible), done by one who also is conversant in Hebrew and the Jewish tradition, but remarkably free of the concerns that typically motivate academic commentaries.  
  
 I begin with Sacks's reading of the two creation stories, attending particularly to the relation of "Man" to the birds, fish, and non-human land animals. I query Sacks's interpretation of the meaning of the human, in the first creation account, as being the sole created and blessed thing that is said to be neither "so" nor "good," making the human closer to birds and fish (who are also not said to be "so") than to the other land animals. By sharp contrast, the land animals, in the second account, are intended companions of Man who, while close, yet fail to satisfy the strange problem of Man's aloneness.  
  
 From both accounts, Sacks concludes that political relations were not intended by God in creation, but discovered by God to be necessary and thus accepted. The paper investigates how within Sacks's global interpretations of "rule" from the sun's "rule" in Genesis 1 (its first appearance), through the human's "dominion," on to the institution of kingship our relation to other land animals finds its place.  
  
 After creation and politics, this paper makes a point about animal sacrifice. Sacks has a coherent understanding of biblical sacrifice as not being from God, and yet accepted by God as part of a system of rites and practices whose goal is the Jubilee Year. The trajectory to the Jubilee Year is traced by Sacks from the animals in God's first command regarding sacrifice (Genesis 15).  
  
 On Sacks's reading, Genesis does not have a univocal understanding of animals. Rather, it shows a unity of all living things, which by necessity must be divided into ruler and ruled, and which then can degenerate into one against another. In the end, Sacks argues, the Bible rejects the "beautiful pagan notion" of a simple unity of humans with other animals, such unity being ultimately injurious to the jubilee unity which humans must have for each other.  
  
 The paper concludes with an indication of lines along which theological ethicists could critique Sacks's work, as well as an indication of where it could be helpful.

Dr. John Berkman

University of Toronto

“The Risen Jesus directs all creatures to our common home in heaven: The Trinitarian Structure of Laudato Si’s Theology of Non-Human Animals”

Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si has been recognized as a watershed document for rethinking Catholic theology with regard to “our common home”. In contrast, little has been said about the significance of Laudato Si for an ethics of non-human animals. This is unsurprising, since Laudato Si largely avoids moralizing with regard to human treatment of non-human animals.

However, understood theologically, Laudato Si constitutes a major development of Catholic doctrine with regard to non-human animals, being the first authoritative statement that unequivocally and emphatically teach the intrinsic goodness of non-human animals. It locates this goodness in a Trinitarian context. While creation is a work of the Trinity, each Person creates with a personal propert; God the Father loves animals into existence, the Holy Spirit indwells every animal, and Jesus guides each creature to their fullness to their heavenly home.

The mantra of Laudato Si is “everything is interrelated,” and this applies to its Trinitarian account of non-human animals. Laudato Si argues that we human beings are not able to live in right relationship to God unless we are also living in right relationship with all other creatures of God. This is in part because every animal bears in itself a Trinitarian structure.  
While these theological claims are significant, Laudato Si does not, nor could not be expected to develop the implications of its theology. For example, Laudato Si cannot be expected to tell us what it means for the Holy Spirit to indwell an elephant, or for Jesus to guide a chimpanzee to its heavenly home.

This paper first presents the contours of Laudato Si’s Trinitarian theology of non-human animals. Second, it compares the theological claims of Laudato Si regarding non-human with those of David Clough in his On Animals, Volume 1, and with those of Celia Deane-Drummond in her The Wisdom of the Liminal. In making these comparisons, the paper will suggest in light of Laudato Si a number of key questions that a Catholic theology of non-human animals must now address.

Mrs. Jacqueline Broen

University of Aberdeen

“Muir's evolving theological orientation regarding the relationship of humankind to other species”

John Muir (1838-1913) was the Scottish-American naturalist whose own immersion into the American wilderness would become the impetus for his emerging environmental ethical philosophy that would ultimately transform the American cultural/physical landscape and influence international conservation efforts for several hundred years thereafter. Today the United Nations has premised its UNESCO classifications of international areas of outstanding scientific importance and bio-diversity from the dialogue John Muir developed during his participation in the American National Parks movement. Muir also founded and served as president of the first nationally recognized conservation organization, the Sierra Club, which has the specific remit to promote public involvement in government law and policy regarding environmental ethical issues, including the care of wildlife. For decades after his death, John Muir was often described by secular historians as having abandoned his Christian faith in deference to a more secular scientific orientation. Subsequent assessment of John Muir's writing has indicated, however, that this interpretation evidences inadequate breadth of theological perspective and/or a measure of cultural anthropological naivete regarding the nature of religious orientation in the United States. This paper suggests that Muir was a non-denominationalist, but a profoundly committed Christian, and a current reassessment of his writing and his personal letters substantiate a revisionist understanding of his theological orientation.   
  
Muir's theological interpretation of humankind's relationship to the rest of Creation articulates a distinction in roles for various dimensions of the natural world, rather than a theological dialect which articulates the place of nature as solely subservient to the needs of humankind. Muir's reassessment of the concept of stewardship was to dictate his own environmental ethic regarding the rights of wildlife, the fellowship of plant, animals, and even insects with our species. Muir was an articulate advocate against exploitation of animals and wilderness by commercial interests, passive negligence of environmental ethics by democratic societies, sport hunting of wildlife in all its forms, and urbanization's immersion into wholly artificial and humanly construed environments devoid of engagement with the natural world.   
  
Least appreciated, perhaps, is Muir's role in early wildlife cinematography the primary means through which our species in the West now engages with issues and information about the natural world.

Rev. Andrew Errington

University of Aberdeen

“Go to the ant. The wisdom of animals in the book of Proverbs and its implications for ethics”

At a number of significant points the book of Proverbs draws attention to the ways in which various animals illustrate what it is to be wise. Reflection on these texts can provide a different perspective on a number of questions that have been important in the history of philosophy and Christian ethics, to do with the nature of practical reason and the virtues of prudence and wisdom. The animal texts in Proverbs point to a wider conception of wisdom in the book, which calls into question the idea that, as Aristotle and Thomas held, practical wisdom is an intellectual virtue. Practical wisdom, on the contrary, is first and foremost about particular, determinate forms of action. This paper would outline this argument, and begin to sketch its implications for our understanding of deliberation.

Dr. David Grumett

University of Edinburgh

“Theological Ethics and Farm Animal Welfare”

In the UK, about one billion farm animals are reared and slaughtered for food annually with a further 50 million used for eggs and milk. Their welfare is important for several connected reasons. EU and UK law requires that it be protected. Their annual production value is about £12.5 billion. Welfare is a matter of concern for increasing numbers of consumers. Humans have a moral duty to take seriously the welfare of the animals that they farm and consume. From a societal perspective, human treatment of farm animals is likely to influence behaviour in other areas of life, such as the treatment of other humans.  
  
Animal welfare specialists tend to view religion negatively because of its primary association, at the level of practice, with non-stun slaughter for halal and kosher consumption. EU legislation, which permits exemption from normal slaughter protocols for religious reasons, exacerbates this. Nevertheless, following two years' service on DEFRA's Farm Animal Welfare Committee, I consider that theological ethics has at least three positive contributions to make to welfare discourse. To do so, it needs to remain squarely in the penultimate. Many theological treatments of animals advocate vegetarianism, and in so doing severely limit their potential for practical policy impact.  
  
1. In the Old Testament, the animals that feature most prominently are farmed. Land animals, in particular, are presented in close relation with humans and as sharing some legal protections, such as the entitlement to rest. The farming and killing of animals is viewed as part of the natural order, although not all animals are available for consumption. Stockpersons such as shepherds and swineherds frequently appear in biblical narratives, which establish correspondences between the human husbandry of animals and God's governance, in Christ, of the world. A theological virtue ethics has constructive potential here, in light of the considerable current interest in promoting good stockpersonship and the intrinsically relational character of animal farming.  
  
2. Many farmers unquestioningly accept that different species display characteristic modes of flourishing, with the freedom to exhibit normal behaviour one of the widely accepted Five Freedoms. If an animal enjoys this superlatively, it is considered to have a life worth living, or even better, a good life. Through traditions such as Thomist natural law, theological ethics may enrich this teleological discourse in ways not offered by most philosophical approaches to ethics.  
  
3. In the Old Testament, the blood is the life force shared by land animals and humans and therefore God's property, as reaffirmed in Acts 15.29. The prescribed slaughter method of exsanguination by neck cutting was typically less painful for the animal than the alternatives then available. The privileging of the least painful method then available should serve as encouragement to pursue their modern equivalents, such as captive bolt stunning for cattle, which have a secondary vertebral blood supply to the brain, which is not severed by neck cutting.

Dr. Timothy Harvie

St. Mary's University

“Sacramental Relations: Companion Animals, Divine Presence, and Moral Formation from Thomas Aquinas”

After being cast to the margins for decades, John Berkman has noted that there has been an increasing interest among Catholic scholars on theological reflection on non-human animals. Scholars such as Berkman, Celia Deane-Drummond, Charles Chamosy, Elizabeth Johnson, among others have joined other Catholic theologians, such as Denis Edwards, writing on the intersections of science, ecology, and theology. In the work of Berkman and Deane-Drummond, in particular, recovering aspects of Thomas Aquinas has been a central feature in moving the dialogue forward. Much of this work has sought to recover the potential implications of specific aspects of Thomas' thought. In particular, the relevance of synthesizing Thomas' ideas on cognition, the emotions, accounts of virtue, and the ultimate telos of creaturely life in God have occupied central place. In this work, significant strides have been made in overcoming the anthropocentric trends in Aquinas' theological project whilst still embracing his overarching methodology of blending current scientific findings with philosophical and religious reflection. Outside of theological thought, much philosophical work has been done in exploring the inter-subjective implications of continental philosophy for an animal ethic. Building on the work of Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and others, such scholars explore the philosophical contours of relational encounters and what these entail for moral praxis and political engagement. This paper contributes to both discussions insofar as it argues that the concrete relationships humans have with other animals may manifest the divine presence and be understood as sacramental in nature. Through a critical and constructive dialogue with Thomas Aquinas, I will argue that an 'active will' [rationem voluntatis] communicates its goodness to others (ST 1.19.2), and that this occurs in the social relationships of a pair's interactions. These interactions are the embodied, dialogical relations of creatures in their cognitive and affective encounters. Furthermore, Thomas argues that sacraments make those who partake in them holy as the sacramental is a cause of grace in a subject (ST 3.60.2; 3.62.1). Therefore, while the medieval theologian argues that sensible creatures signify something holy but do not make humans holy, this paper will argue that contemporary scientific accounts of animal cognition, philosophical accounts of relational encounters with animal others, and theological accounts of Christ's incarnation as evolved animal flesh, do meet Thomas' criterion for sacramental efficacy and presence. Using companion animals to frame the discussion, this paper argues that both the human and non-human animal partners partake and contribute to the relational encounter that becomes both the sacramental sign and cause of grace in a mutual and reciprocal reorienting of both toward God. Possible analogies may be found in the Catholic account of the sacrament of marriage states that the spouses are ministers to each other, each animal (human and other) are ministers to each other and thus partners in manifesting the sacramental presence of the divine. Both human and non-human animal become minister, partaker, and one who manifests the sacramental presence of the divine to impart grace and shape the moral character of the other.

Dr. Jeremy Kidwell

University of Birmingham

"Behold, I am making all things new": Nostalgia, novelty and creatively conservation in theological perspective

As contemporary reserve managers and conservation scientists attempt to manage ecosystem biodiversity, one periodic outcome of this work is the development of eradication programmes which are meant to destroy undesired or so-called "invasive" species and protect or improve the biodiversity of so-called "native" species. A range of scholars in the environmental sciences have drawn attention to the problematic aspects of this approach, particularly its tendency to deploy colonial paradigms in sifting out creaturely life. In response, scientists, particularly urban ecologists, have begun to develop alternative framings of creaturely relationships, such as the novel ecosystems concept (Hobbs, Higgs, and Hall 2013). In this paper, I consider whether the Christian theology of time might offer some useful guidance as Christians face the vexing quandary of declining biodiversity. In particular, I provide a critical theological assessment of the forms of temporality that are latent in each of these two framings of creaturely life: the past temporality of nostalgia and the future-oriented approach which seeks to embrace novel ecosystems. I conclude with an assessment of ways that a Christian theology of time might offer a more holistic frame to this discourse.

Dr. Manitza Kotze

University of the Western Cape

Feasting on Flesh: Vegetarianism, the Eucharist and Resisting Injustice

Food occupies a central place in human life and identity. William Robert Smith uses the term 'commensality' to refer to what in the Christian tradition might be termed 'fellowship', stating that those that eat and drink together are bound together by the act, united in friendship and mutual obligation. In this contribution, I am especially interested in this relationship between food and identity, particularly how it is expressed as resistance to other discourses, as is often used in religious spheres. David Freidenreich indicates that throughout the Hebrew Bible, this distinction between Us and Them is emphasised.   
  
Food and identity as resistance is also overtly found in discussions such as vegetarian identity, as resistance to both the unethical treatment of animals and in feminist circles, the perceived link between meat and masculinity. American philosopher Cathryn Bailey explains how her vegetarian consumption characterises her self-chosen identity as a feminist and argues that the ethical attitude towards animals tends to be a marker of a gendered politics. Vegetarianism is also closely linked to the supposed superiority of humanity over animals, which is further constituted through the act of eating other animals.  
  
The relation between food and identity is further made most explicit within the Christian community in the celebration of the Eucharist, in God's presence as bread, as the Body of Christ. As early as the Middle Ages, women have also used the Eucharist to resist patriarchal, familial and religious authority in various ways, such as refusing to eat anything other than the consecrated host or disputing the legitimacy of some priests by vomiting up the host, claiming it was unconsecrated. In this contribution, I will look at how the Eucharistic community might also then serve as resistance against injustice and subjugation today, also in the food industry and the treatment of animals.

Caireen Likely

University of Aberdeen

“Humiliated Humans: Resources for Charitable Human/Non-Human Relations in Bonhoeffer's Theological Anthropology”

In this paper, I propose to present the theological anthropology that the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer develops in his 1933 lectures Creation and Fall as providing a significant resource for a more humble and charitable relationship between humans and non-human creation. In particular, I will set out three of the characteristics of humans found in those lectures embodied, dependent, and finite as of marked value in that they draw attention to our shared physicality without requiring a flattening of human/non-human distinctions; highlight human dependence upon non-human creation not only physically, but in terms of self-understanding; and provide a reminder that just as human finitude is defined in terms of the genuine transcendence of God, who himself limits human possibility, so the finitude of non-human creation must be defined in those same terms and thus its possibilities are ultimately circumscribed by God's interaction with, and intentions for, creation and not our own. Moreover, I will suggest that interpreting these characteristics through the lens of Bonhoeffer's conception of humiliation, as he employs it in his 1933 lectures on Christology, presents the possibility of identifying passive receiving as the revelation in humiliation of genuine human action. Such an interpretation of human action indicates that the passiveness of non-human creation in suffering, undergoing, human will cannot be despised, neither can it be viewed as the grounds upon which to make too sharp and uncharitable a distinction between human and non-human. For humans themselves are ones whose most meaningful action is to suffer, to receive passively - even in an embodied manner as is seen paradigmatically in the Eucharist - the work of God; and in this humans differ from non-human creation not because of their capacities or possibilities, but because Jesus Christ chose to take on human flesh in the work of redemption.

Mr. David Lilley

University of Aberdeen

“Dumpster Dwelling, Sabbath Desecrating Seagulls”

In Aberdeen, seagulls and humans live at odds, to say the least. For human practitioners of Sabbath, efforts to sanctify the day of holy rest unto the Lord are absurdly contrasted by the screeching, clawing, and garbage-eating of seagulls whose domain exceeds the skies to shape every street, rooftop, and especially dumpster in the city. That rest which is sanctified, their activity seems to destroy. This paper explores this tension inherent to Sabbath keeping within a non-observant world. It posits an answer to a rarely asked question: what does Sabbath mean for the seagulls of Aberdeen?  
  
The screeching seagulls in the dumpster do not immediately evoke the blessed peace of creation's seventh day. Their jagged cries and garbage-flecked beaks challenge any pristine conception of Sabbath, bringing to mind the chaos of Gen 1:2 more than the rest of Gen 2:2. Their very presence resists conceptualizing rest as means of instantiating pre-lapsarian perfection; their anti-contribution asserts the necessarily teleological nature of Sabbath's peace.  
  
The chaos notwithstanding, seagulls live under the umbrella of the Creator's care. I argue for the extension of Barth's account in which the seventh day at the crown of creation invites human creatures to rest with the Creator. Gen 2:1-3, the locus of Barth's Sabbath exegesis, eschews any special reference to humans in displaying an event of unfathomable scope: "the heavens and the earthâ€¦and all their multitude," God rested, "from all the work that he had done." The invitation seems to pertain to all of creation. Furthermore, other animals live within the scope of human care. The Sinai Sabbath command includes the ox, donkey, and all livestock among those to refrain from work on the Sabbath, not only the humans to whom it is addressed. To participate in God's Sabbath necessitates being shaped by the movement of divine care. Non-human animals are enfolded by Sabbath's holiness.  
  
Unlike the oxen of Israel, the seagulls of Aberdeen exist outside the scope of human control. Yet, their residence within the city of human habitation clearly locates them within the scope of human care, and their status as creatures ascribes them a telos in the eternal Sabbath to dawn upon the new creation. Seagulls may not keep the Sabbath, but they are kept by it. This other-oriented keeping, I argue, also pertains to humans who do not or cannot keep it themselves. This paper ends by detailing some practical ways in which Sabbath keeping changes our perception of the seagulls, and incorporates practitioners in the keeping of all creatures. Even the seagulls have their end in rest.

Dr. Michael Mawson

University of Aberdeen

“why Non-Human Animals are not Moral Subjects (But neither Are We)”

This paper will explore questions of moral agency and subjectivity with reference to Friedrich Nietzsche and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. On the one hand, I will outline how Nietzsche and Bonhoeffer both display a turn to concrete living or life, that is, vis-Ã -vis broader post-Enlightenment commitments to a kind of rational agency and moral subjectivity that stands prior to concrete living. On the other hand, I will suggest how this can challenge many standard ways of distinguishing between human and non-human animals, that is, on the basis of a distinctively human moral agency or subjectivity.  
  
In the first section, I will outline Nietzsche's criticisms of the idea that we are moral subjects prior to and apart from our more immediate action and displays of strength. In The Genealogy of Morals, he famously identifies this way of understanding human beings as moral subjects as a result of 'slave morality': 'This type of man [the slave] needs to believe in a neutral independent "subject"â€¦' He needs to do so, according to Nietzsche, to 'gain the right to make the bird of prey accountable for being a bird of prey.' Following Nietzsche, the slaves invented this notion of an autonomous moral subject both to justify their own weakness (they actively chose to be what they are) and to judge the action and strength of their masters (who might have acted or chosen otherwise).   
  
In the second section, I will demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's Ethics has deep, often neglected resonances with Nietzsche's turn to concrete acting and related critique of the idea of moral subjectivity. Without embracing Nietzsche's vitalism in its entirety, Bonhoeffer is similarly critical of any account of human beings as subjects that stand prior to and apart from more concrete ways of acting and relating. Bonhoeffer likewise understands human action and engagement as more deeply embedded within and immediately responsive to concrete reality and natural life, albeit while providing a different account (than Nietzsche) of what these are.   
  
In the final section, I shall more briefly reflect upon the implications of this Nietzsche's and Bonhoeffer's shared critique of moral subjectivity and turn to concrete life for how we negotiate the boundary between human and non-human animals. As mentioned above, I will suggest that this challenges attempts to straightforwardly distinguish human beings from other animals on the basis of their moral subjectivity. There have, of course, been many recent attempts to complicate this division precisely by affirming the agency moral subjectivity of many non-human animals. But this paper will instead argue that neither human nor non-human are moral subjects, or at least that this language or way of thinking is misleading and unhelpful.

Dr. Elizabeth Phillips

Westcott House, Cambridge

“The Peaceable Kingdom: Eschatology, Pacifism, and Non-Human Animals”

This paper will explore options for Christian approaches to human treatment of non-human animals through dialogue with varieties of Christian pacifism, particularly in relation to eschatology. Some forms of Christian pacifism are grounded deontologically, employing the teachings of Jesus (particularly in the Sermon on the Mount) as Christian law or duty. Others are grounded consequentially, often in terms of realities of contemporary warfare instead of an absolute prohibition of violence, and arrive at pacifism de facto instead of de jure. Still others are grounded teleologically, seeing a nonviolent trajectory through creation, incarnation, and new creation which places peace at the heart of the ultimate telos and current flourishing of humanity. Christian approaches to non-human animals can also be mapped in terms of deontological approaches which tend to focus on human rights or duties of humane treatment, consequentialist approaches which often focus on the impact of contemporary industrial farming and meat production, and - considerably less common - teleological approaches which find something more than metaphor in the animal imagery of the peaceable kingdom.  
  
In the teleological Christian pacifism, differing eschatological perspectives and emphases result in yet further varieties of pacifism. Differing ways of relating creation and eschatology, differing positions on the spectrum between unrealized and realized eschatologies, and differing ways of relating eschatology to politics all contribute to variations in approaches to violence and war. This paper seeks to map these variations onto different possibilities for approaches to the treatment of non-human animals, and asks what might be gained from such an attempt. It will explore whether such a map of variations of approaches is preferable to the more widespread focus on the yes-or-no question: should Christians be vegetarians, and it will consider what may be gained through an eschatological and teleological framework, in contrast to the more predominate deontological and consequentialist approaches.

Jacob Quick

“Zizioulas, Art and Animals: Contemporary Art and Christian/Animal Interaction”

John Zizioulas is a prominent theologian whose understanding of Trinitarian personhood has profound ramifications for Christianity's approach to animals. Zizioulas maintains that humans are priests of creation who embody the Image of God by properly mediating between God and creation. According to Zizioulas anthropology, humans engage in the divine communion of the Godhead by becoming authentic persons. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit affirm one another in an eternal, self-giving love, Christians also participate within this divine reality by embodying a loving, kenotic reality which affirms the personhood of the other. Since Zizioulas grounds his theological framework within the notion of Trinitarian personhood, his understanding entails that participation within the Trinity is predicated upon the flourishing of relational personhood. With regard to the rest of creation, which is comprised of creatures that are not persons, participation within the divine communion requires a certain "personalization". Zizioulas posits that art can play an influential role within the personalization of creation. In art, animals, in addition to the rest of nature, are infused with personhood as they are artistically depicted by a person who thereby presents this "personalized" representation to God. Thus, humans play a crucial role in the incorporation of all of creation within the communion of God by personalizing it through Christological aesthetics.   
  
My purpose in this paper is to criticize Zizioulas' understanding of the relationship between Christians and animals. I will show that Zizoulas' notion of personalizing creation does not respect the alterity of animals and ultimately assimilates animals within an anthropocentric framework. As part of my argument, I will utilize the work of contemporary artists, such as Olly and Suzi, whose artistic process embodies a way in which Christians can understand, respect, and approach animals as creatures capable of glorifying God. Zizioulas' theological framework does not allow us to approach animals on their own terms and, as a result, fails to adequately engage with the diversity of creation. However, through the art of Olly and Suzi, we have a model in which animals are not merely objects to be represented, but are co-collaborators in the creation of beauty. A robust, Christian understanding of the relationship between humans and animals must acknowledge that humanity's identity is intricately linked with the animal world. By collaborating with animals and engaging them on their own terms, we are presented with an opportunity in which animals can play a formative role in teaching humans how to truly embody the Image of God.

Jennifer Ward

Texas A&M

“Clough's On Animals and the Primary Aim of Creation”

In On Animals (Bloomsbury, 2012) David Clough argues that a great deal of Christian literature has unjustifiably designated human beings as the singular aim of God's creation. This concerns Clough. If human beings are the sole aim of creation, the non-human aspects of creation exist exclusively for humans and have no purposes beyond human service. Such a view has obvious ethical implications for human behavior toward non-human animals. In this paper I argue that Clough does not distinguish between authors who make human beings the sole aim of creation and those who make human beings the primary aim of creation. Unlike viewing human beings as God's singular aim, viewing human beings as God's primary aim allows for subordinate, non-human aims and does not necessitate that non-human animals exist merely for human beings. This obviates Clough's concerns over the ethical implications of centering the purpose of creation solely on humans. Once I have shown that Clough does not recognize this important distinction in the literature, I attempt to offer a tenable solution that is still sensitive to Clough's original project. I argue that Clough's project is compatible with either denying the view that humans are the primary purpose of creation or accepting it. In terms of the former, Clough could choose simply to deny theological grounds for making assertions concerning God's primary purposes in creation. He has already argued that one of the errors in making human beings the sole aim of creation is that we do not have scriptural support for such a claim: "God creates; creation comes into being - the texts are more concerned to establish and celebrate this than to assert God's end in this activity" (On Animals, 4). In order for Clough to be compelling he must expand this argument to cover not only claims that human beings are God's sole aim in creation, but claims that human beings are God's primary aim in creation. However, the position that human beings are God's primary aim in creation is not necessarily damaging to Clough's project. Such a view is compatible with Clough's concern that we "recognize that God's purposes in creation are more than human" (On Animals, 24). Moreover, while there is arguably an implicit normative preeminence of humans over non-human animals in this view, this seems in principle unproblematic for Clough, who writes that "egalitarianism [between humans and non-human animals] seems to me to be ruled out in a theological context by the occasions where Jesus affirms God's care for non-human creatures as a way of giving his human listeners confidence in God's providential care for them"(On Animals, 75).

Mr. Towe Wandegren

Uppsala University

“Hunting for New Members – Swedish Parishes Combining Confirmation with Hunting License”

In the last two decades, the share of young people confirming their baptism within the Church of Sweden has decreased from 51% in 1995, to only 28% in 2015. Moreover, the number of boys attending preparation to be confirmed is much lower than girls. Therefore, several parishes have tried new ways in order to attract young people, reaching from summer camps with sun and baths, skiing camps, sailing camps to – hunting confirmation camps and/or weekly preparation to be confirmed. The latter form, combining traditional confirmation preparation with education to qualify for hunting license, which is particularly aimed at boys, is the topic of this paper. There are several parishes that arrange combined confirmation and hunting preparations. How do they motivate learning about what it means to be a Christian with the education in killing other beings? How do they promote this type of confirmation preparation? How do they construct the binary human – non-human? Is it at all seen as a theological question? Or is it just a matter of ecological sustainability?   
Genesis 1:26-29 have been highly important verses in the Christian theological interpretation of the human being’s role in relation to God and, not the least, the role God has given her in creation. Ever since the early church, theologians have discussed what it means to be Imago Dei, what our duty is – to serve all other creatures on earth like Jesus served us, or to dominate the non-human creation. Humans’ role as governor has been the most common interpretation. Still, as we know, there is a minority claiming that human beings are everybody else’s servant, from the early ascetics to late modern theologians and common Christian believers and activists. The ethical discussion about the role humans and non-humans play in creation has indeed become a significant question for theologians, not the least in the last decades. The ethical problems related to industrial animal farming have dominated the discussion, but the treatment of wild animals has been an important question, too.

I will argue that the combined confirmation preparation, with its education about what Christianity is, together with hunting education, indeed make a highly interesting case for the ethical discussion about human treatment of wild animals, especially the idea about the implication of humans as God’s forester. Therefore, I aim to discuss the confirmation leaders’ arguments and critically analyse them from a theologically based animal ethical perspective. To see us as God’s foresters, in the meaning of a duty to kill other animals for the sake of ecological sustainability, or to not reflect about the killing part at all, is indeed an important ethical issue to reflect upon.

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From Dogs and Dolphins to the Lamb and the Lion: Just War and Animals

Within recent theological ethics, animals have received attention mostly in connection with food and eating practices or medical and pharmaceutical research. In other words, animal rights, sentience, etc are usually considered under the umbrella of either environmental ethics or bioethics. This paper extends theological consideration of animals to just war theory. While Christian pacifists have made reference to animals from Scripture (e.g., Isaiah 11:6: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."), animals have received little, if any, attention from Christian just war theorists. This lacuna seems curious given that historically and today, animals have been involved in war--whether as victims or as participants. Examples include horses, camels, and elephants, as well as dogs and dolphins. If recent theological ethics regards animals as possessing sentience, agency, rights, etc., then how should just war theory, if at all, take them into account? This paper explores this question.